

# The Semaphore

A Publication of the TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

Issue 247

Fall 2024



A RESPITE FROM  
ELECTION STRESS

# KIDS CORNER



by Sarah Kliban  
kids@thd.org

**W**elcome to Kids Corner! THD wants to hear from kids in the neighborhood! If you'd like to ask a question, or you're a kid and want to be interviewed, please contact us at kids@thd.org.



**CATO KENNERLY, 9**

*If you could jump into a pool of anything, what would it be full of?*

"Melted vanilla ice cream because it would probably taste very good. Ben & Jerry's vanilla ice cream. Fully melted, so it's liquidized, so you could actually jump in. If it's solid, then I can't jump in."

*What is something most people don't know about you?*

"My middle name. 'Marcel.' I don't know where it's from. But, to be honest, whenever I think of my middle name, it just reminds me of a carousel. You know, Marcel—carousel."

*Would you rather be able to talk to dogs or talk to cats?*

"Cats. Any cat. I like cats. I just think it would be cool."

*Why is it important to vote?*

"Because then we wouldn't have any leaders. Nobody would be able to decide on anything. It would just be straight up arguing. I guess I'll vote. I'm not really looking forward to it, but I'm not disappointed that it might happen sometime."

*What is your favorite place to hang out in San Francisco?*

"My house. It's somewhere you can stay. A place where you can feel safe, too. There's no favorite part; I like my whole house."

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

As we went to print, THD planned to celebrate its 70th anniversary as well as the 90th anniversary of the Coit Tower Murals on Saturday, October 19 at Pioneer Park. Details and photos in the next issue.



**JOAQUIN CARVALHO, 5**

*If you could jump into a pool of anything, what would it be full of?*

"Pillows. It's the softest thing. It would feel soft."

*What is something most people don't know about you?*

"I really like watching sprint cars. They have a wing on one side, and one is lower, and one is higher. I watch them with my dad in Petaluma. When I'm older, I want to drive sprint cars."

*Would you rather be able to talk to dogs or talk to cats?*

"Cats. Because they're cuter. It would be fun to hear what they have to say. They would tell me when they're hungry."

*Why is it important to vote?*

"I don't know what that is. I don't really care about it."

*What is your favorite place to hang out in San Francisco?*

"We just discovered Marco Polo Italian Ice Cream on Noriega. I just tried Mocha Chip."



**SOFI CARVALHO, 9**

*If you could jump into a pool of anything, what would it be full of?*

"Jell-O. I feel like when you jump in, you slurp around in it, then sink, and then pop back to the top. It sounds really cool. Blue Raspberry. I would only eat just a little because I feel that would be a little unsanitary."

*What is something most people don't know about you?*

"I do contemporary dance. There's a bunch of pointing and jumping on the floor so it gets tiring, but you have to push through. And when you're really in that zone, it's really fun."

*Would you rather be able to talk to dogs or talk to cats?*

"Cats. I have cats and feel like only specific dogs connect with me. I'd like to show up at home and be like 'Meow meow meow?' (Do you want this and this?) It would be cool. Definitely cats."

*Why is it important to vote?*

"It's the little things. Just because you're one person, it adds on to all these other things. Just one little person can make a big difference."

*What is your favorite place to hang out in San Francisco?*

"North Beach. My grandparents got married there. There are cool fun people there. There's actually not that much litter, believe it or not. And there's Joe DiMaggio Playground. It's also where my favorite little restaurant is: Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store."



**JETHRO KORZEN, 13**

*If you could jump into a pool of anything, what would it be full of?*

"A pool of jelly ball thingies—water beads—and warm water. Cold water is a bit too cold, and hot water is too hot. A pool full of them would be especially satisfying...Or Jell-O if I can't find the balls. Lemon Jell-O."

*What is something most people don't know about you?*

"I have a 3-D printer. I saved up a lot of my own money and bought it (my dad for half of it). We built it. It comes with a bag of gummy bears and in the instructions as a reward, you eat a gummy bear. I'd seen some cool things you could make and wanted to be able to make that."

*Would you rather be able to talk to dogs or talk to cats?*

"Dogs. I'm near them more, and my mom's allergic to cats. It's already not that hard to tell what they want. It would be pretty cool."

*Why is it important to vote?*

"If nobody voted, that wouldn't really work. If it's the president or a poll in class, maybe not everyone will vote, but you won't be able to decide on the topic. If you're in the U.S., that's a big way of how we decide things. I'm learning about medieval times; voting wouldn't be important because there would have been one ruler who decided everything."

*What is your favorite place to hang out in San Francisco?*

"Other than my house, there's this fun arcade, Free Gold Watch. It's cheap and fun. It has fun games and a jelly bean dispenser."



## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Nick Ferris  
President@thd.org

**H**ello, THD! I'm excited to share some updates and reflect on all the great things happening this past quarter. At the time that I'm writing, it feels like a whirlwind with all the elections and ballot measures going on right now. The Telegraph Hill Dwellers has so many events taking place. It's exciting, but even I find it difficult to stay on top of all the emails. I suspect things will ease up a little bit in November.

In this, my second report, I am sharing updates on goals we laid out at the beginning of the fiscal year as well as giving my viewpoint on the health of the organization.

Overall, I am happy to report we are increasing our capacity to "work" by getting committees meeting regularly, seeing our membership grow, and advocating for the neighborhood—all very positive signs.

All of our committees (except one) have met in the past quarter—quite a testament to our members' dedication! You can find more detailed updates in the committee reports in these pages; in general, there has been significant progress across the board.

I'm highlighting this activity because committees are so important to THD's functioning as a healthy organization. If committees meet, it means work can be done at the committee level and with active member participation. If we don't have committees meeting regularly, the work falls on the board, and it dramatically limits our ability to advocate for the neighborhood. It's

a simple numbers game.

Ironically, the one committee that hasn't met yet is a committee that is one of our best and most active, Art & Culture! Historically this is one of our most important committees because it focuses on...the art and culture of North Beach. Today, this committee organizes Films with Friends, a very successful monthly movie night for the neighborhood. The work falls on the shoulders of a select few, but look for an email announcing our first Art & Culture committee meeting in November at which we'd love to get our readers involved.

Now for some good news on membership: We're growing! Year-to-date, we've had a net increase of 12 members. While that is progress, candidly, we're aiming for much more. We've added many new members this year, but the challenge is that we've had many members leave for various reasons, like their moving out of the neighborhood.

It's all part of the cycle, but I encourage everyone to continue inviting friends and neighbors to join us so we can expand our community even further. One of the easiest ways to meet members is by attending our monthly happy hour at 5:30 p.m. on the third Thursday of every month at the Savoy Tivoli. Another easy option is to come to Caffe Trieste on the First Friday of every month for a meetup, also at 5:30 p.m. From there you can meet old friends, make new ones, or find a committee with which to get involved. One of the greatest pleasures I receive from being President of the Telegraph Hill Dwellers is meeting new neighbors. The more you show up, the more you get involved, the more you receive. That's been my experience.

Now this isn't to say that all things have been good news. One area for which I take responsibility: We have not yet created a digital format of the publication you are currently reading. As readers know well, *The Semaphore* is an incredible piece of work and a testament to the organization's health and strengths.

Neighborhood association publications were quite common in the past but have largely all disappeared because they take a tremendous amount of time and work. (Shoutout to our editors Cap Caplan and Judy Irving without whom *The Semaphore* would not exist!) We believe *The Semaphore* needs to take on a digital format (in addition to its paper one), so more members and neighbors can access this publication. Long story short, we need someone familiar with WordPress or other digital publication formats who can help us get this online. Is that you? If you might be able to help us, I would be very grateful if you could reach out to me for a chat at [nick.ferris@thd.org](mailto:nick.ferris@thd.org). Thank you!

One of the areas I am always tremendously proud of is our neighborhood advocacy. We've been closely following several highrise building proposals that significantly change the waterfront. Projects like 955 Sansome and 875 Sansome are being monitored by our Planning & Zoning and Waterfront Committees. These are projects that deeply concern us, not least of all for the precedent they set: A gradual wall on the waterfront is the trend we are seeing. Please join our next P&Z or Waterfront committee meetings to learn more.

On the election front, THD has been educating voters on the myriad ballot initiatives this November. We co-hosted a ballot walkthrough on September 29th with Sunny Angulo and Nate Horrell of Supervisor Aaron Peskin's Office alongside our friends from the Barbary Coast Neighborhood Association. It was an educational and engaging event held on Zoom, as we went through every ballot measure, giving members a forum to ask questions and learn how they'll vote.

As always, I'm so grateful to serve as your President. Our board of directors is smart, dedicated, and fun, and I'm confident we'll continue to have a productive and exciting year ahead. Thank you all for your ongoing support, and here's to even more growth and engagement in the coming months! ☺

## FRIENDS OF WASHINGTON SQUARE

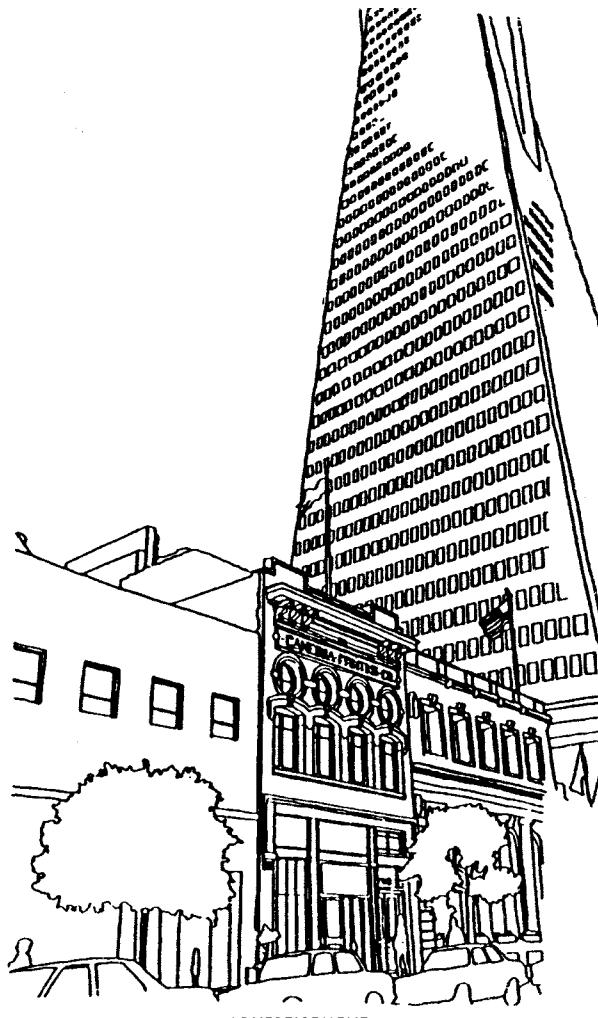
Meet on the 2nd Tuesday every month, with work parties in the Square every quarter. See website for times, dates, locations.

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# RESTAURANT NEWS

New Semaphore writer Stephen Listisen extols the repast at Da Flora and promises more dining excursions in future issues. Do you have a must-try destination for him? Let Stephen know at [semaphore@thd.org](mailto:semaphore@thd.org).

—Cap Caplan, Editor, [semaphore@thd.org](mailto:semaphore@thd.org)

## DA FLORA



Flourless chocolate cake with raspberry sauce, crumbled toppings, and whipped cream.

© STEPHEN LISTISEN



Tiramisu.

© STEPHEN LISTISEN



"Salsiccia and peppers" with mild fennel sausage, gypsy pepper sugo, zucchini, and pecorino fritters and topped with creme fraiche.

© STEPHEN LISTISEN



Sweet potato gnocchi, sherry cream smoked bacon.

© STEPHEN LISTISEN

by Stephen Listisen

**A**s a fresh transplant to North Beach from Ohio, one of the best ways I began (and continue) to learn more about our neighborhood was by visiting the various restaurants, cafes, and wine bars that it has to offer. Until recently, Da Flora had been on my "list" of local restaurants, and my visit there with three of my closest friends on a late Thursday night in August did not disappoint. In fact, it was one of the best meals I've had in North Beach since I relocated here in September 2022.

Despite walking past the building no less than a few hundred times over the past couple of years and noticing its eclectic, old-world design, my friends and I had few expectations heading into our dining experience at Da Flora.

However, upon entering the restaurant, we were greeted with warm hospitality from an accommodating host who seated us at the last available table for four. (Note: The host encouraged us to make reservations in the future, if possible.) Before diving into the cuisine, it's worth mentioning that Da Flora has about three dozen seats, making it an intimate dining experience and the perfect place to catch up with friends about recent travel, job interviews, and pop culture.

Despite barely breaking the surface of our conversation topics for the evening, my friends and I dove into the menu, which boasts a variety of unique, seasonal dishes without making sometimes indecisive diners like me feel choice overload.

The group quickly settled on two orders of the house-made focaccia and a plate of sweet potato gnocchi with sherry cream and smoked bacon. Both dishes were warm and satisfying yet light at the same time—just what we needed on a quintessential evening in San Francisco "Fogust." Personally, I would've been content just having another plate of the gnocchi as a main dish—it was *that* good.

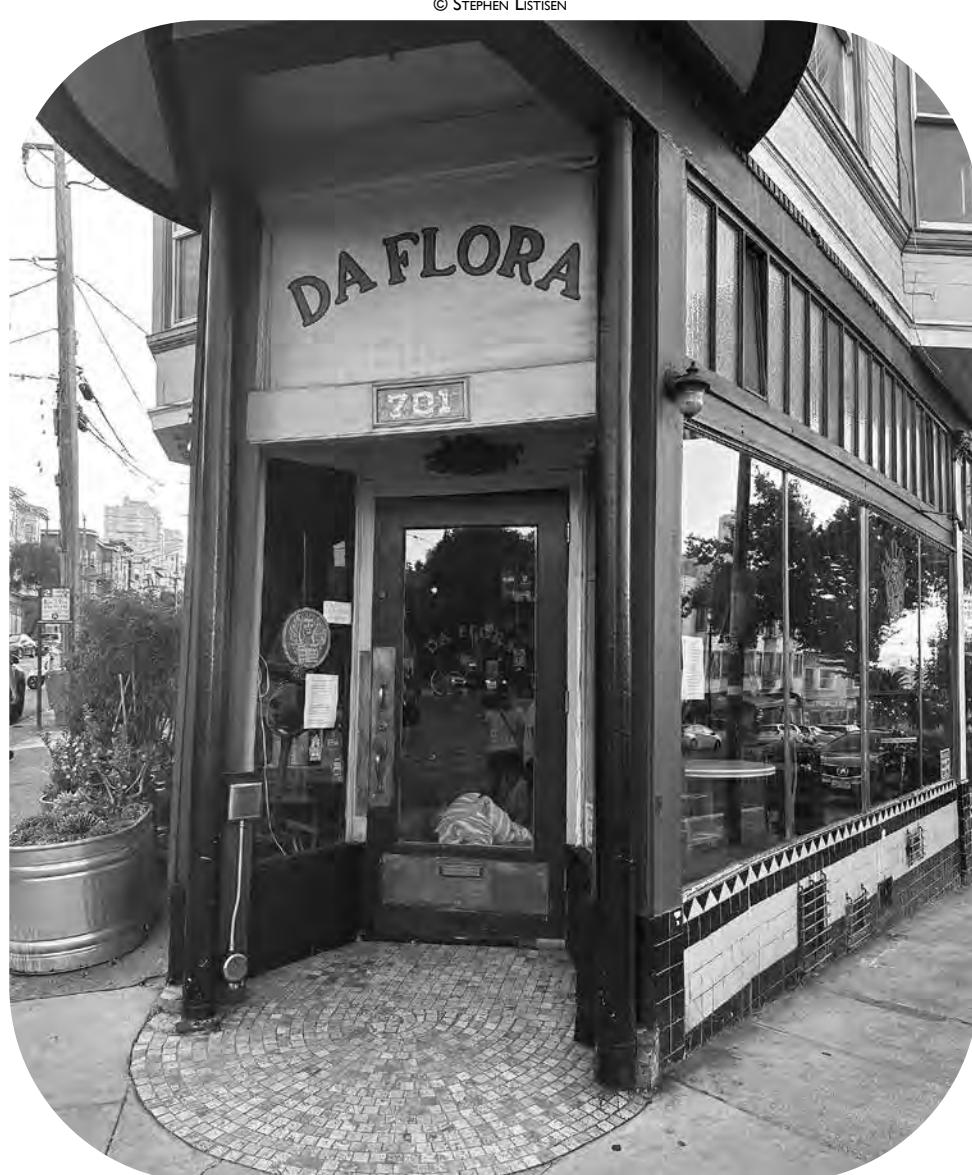
Even before ordering our main course, my friends and I were already all-but-sold on the dark academia aesthetic and delicious, unassuming "primi" dishes that Da Flora offers diners. So, when our server returned, we eagerly ordered a few items from the "secondi" section of the menu.

When we were served, we were immersed in five to ten minutes of near silence as we cleaned our plates. Resuming conversation, the group agreed that while everything we ate was fantastic, the salsiccia and peppers with mild fennel sausage, gypsy pepper sugo, zucchini, and pecorino fritters and topped with creme fraiche, as well as the risotto slow-braised duck leg

ragu, stole the show. For me, the salsiccia and peppers was packed with complementary flavors that served a healthy helping of nostalgia, as zucchini fritters were a mainstay at my Italian family reunions growing up.

Then, in a decision that seemed to be against our better judgment (based purely on how full we were from the first and second courses), the group ordered two desserts: flourless chocolate cake with raspberry sauce, crumbled toppings, and whipped cream and tiramisu. As someone with a sweet tooth, I must say that both desserts were among the best I've had in North Beach, which is saying something, considering the lineup of pastry shops, bakeries, and cafes that surround us.

All-in-all, I was thoroughly impressed by my dining experience at Da Flora, from start to finish. All three courses – primi, secondi, and dessert – were fantastic, each with its own highlights. And, despite having an ever-growing list of restaurants I want to try in the City, I'm excited to visit Da Flora again soon for dishes from a future seasonal menu.



Exterior of Da Flora, corner of Columbus Avenue and Filbert Street.

© STEPHEN LISTISEN

**DA FLORA**  
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## DISTRICT 3 SUPERVISOR'S REPORT

by Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
aaron.peskin@sfgov.org

This November, for the first time in San Francisco history, we will elect a mayor at the same time that we elect a President of the United States, after voters adopted a consolidated election schedule. I hope that you will all vote for my childhood classmate, Kamala Harris, for President.

As for the rest of the ballot, here's my breakdown of the measures you need to know about.

### PROP A—Overdue School Facilities Bond —Reluctant YES.

Allows \$790,000,000 in general obligation bonds for facilities, technology, and other capital upgrades in the SFUSD, including the renovation of one large high school, as well as targeted investments in critical restroom repairs and \$225 million for a new centralized Student Nutrition Services food hub. I am heartbroken and very frustrated by the poor management of the school district, which has deteriorated before our eyes, forcing teachers to quit after unacceptable payroll fiascoes and other incompetent mismanagement by the Superintendent. And while I'm not happy that SFUSD is threatening to close schools in the same breath it is authorizing two new schools to be built, this bond is an important investment that, one hopes, new leadership will be able to implement to give our kids and teachers safe spaces to learn and teach.

### PROP B—Health, Homelessness, & Improvement Bond—YES.

Allows \$390 million in general obligation bonds for a variety of capital projects, most importantly, funding for critical public health projects like an expanded psych emergency services ward at SF General Hospital, mandated improvements at Laguna Honda Hospital in order to keep our hard-fought re-accreditation, rebuilding of City Clinic (the largest source of HIV-AIDS prevention services in the City), and, special to our district, the rebuild of a seismically-safe Chinatown/North Beach Public Health Center above the Broadway Tunnel on Mason Street. While I did not sign onto the Mayor's original proposal because she replaced critical health facilities with funding for high-profile beautification improvements, after weeks of negotiating with her, I was able to get the funding for the hospitals and clinics back in—and agreed to sign as the co-author. I therefore now commend Prop B to you without reservation.

### PROP C—Combat Corruption with Office of the Inspector General—YES!

I have spent my entire career in public service combatting corruption and exposing waste and fraud, including spearheading the effort to force Recology to refund \$120 million of overcharges back to ratepayers in the wake of Mohammed Nuru's arrest. The string of unending corruption scandals in City Hall spurred me to research implementing the national gold standard that other cities have instituted to root out corruption: an Office of the Inspector General, with the power of subpoena and search warrant and ability to investigate third party contractors. As our former City Controller Ed Harrington has noted: "The City must stop waiting for the FBI and DOJ to come in and clean up our local messes. As soon as we smell smoke, we should be investigating, and the days of forever-delayed fiscal audits must end." An Inspector General would not be an elected position but have an elevated and clear mandate within the Controller's office to carry out the specific work of identifying fraud and waste—not waiting for the federal government to do it.

### PROP D—Destructive, Divisive, and Deceptive—NO!

Billionaire technocrat Sir Michael Moritz paid more than \$1 million for professional signature gatherers to get this deceptive 58-page ballot measure on with his SuperPAC, TogetherSF Action. The measure was written behind closed doors by TogetherSF and arbi-

# BALLOT BREAKDOWN

### Prop K—Unnecessary Non-Park & Highway Closure that Circumvents Impacted Neighborhood—No.

I have gone on an extensive listening tour and researched this seemingly well-intentioned measure and have decided to vote "No" based on several factors: 1) the environmental impacts of incentivizing more foot traffic and group gatherings on fragile ecosystems like the snowy plover habitat without any mitigations; 2) the total lack of planning to mitigate rerouting of traffic into residential neighborhoods; 3) the fact that this doesn't actually create or fund a park. I know what it takes to create parks; this is what I've done much of my adult life at the Trust for Public Land and the American Land Conservancy, and this measure overstates what it will actually do; and 4) the fact that this just didn't need to be on the ballot and has created serious division within the neighborhoods adjacent to the Great Highway. My position on Prop K does not preclude my support for a park or a street closure in the future. (I was a champion for bringing down the Embarcadero Freeway to open up the waterfront to the public and to turn the Central Freeway into Patricia's Green, but we did it WITH impacted communities and studied the ways to mitigate negative impacts and planned for the best results.) With all due respect to Supervisor Joel Engardio who put this on the ballot, this would be as if I put an unresearched proposal on the ballot to close down the Embarcadero to traffic and let the entire City vote on what would most directly impact South Beach, Barbary Coast, North Beach, and Telegraph Hill neighborhoods. There is a better way, and it's working WITH communities.

### Prop L—Tax Waymos and Ubers to Fund Muni—Yes.

It's no secret that Muni needs an incredible amount of investment to continue to provide service to the hundreds of thousands of San Franciscans and visitors who rely on it. This community-authored measure is well-written and increases the tax that I originally levied on ride-shares to help fund Muni transit (the great equalizer!), which is essential to our post-pandemic recovery here in San Francisco.

### Prop M—Business Tax Reform to Stabilize SF and Give Small Businesses Relief—Yes.

I helped author this complicated overhaul of our tax code to provide critical relief to small businesses while stabilizing the taxes paid by our top job providers to keep them in SF. It provides a \$5 million tax break for 2,700 small businesses and lowered rates for grocery stores (like the ones that I helped attract to North Beach and North Point) and right-sizes the City's business tax with necessary technical adjustments.

### Prop 5—Allow Affordable Housing and Infrastructure Funding to Be Approved with a 55%+1 vote—Yes.

This will make it easier to pass bonds for affordable housing and critical infrastructure in San Francisco and throughout the State of California.

### Prop 33—Repeal Costa Hawkins (and Allow Us to Expand Rent Control)—Yes.

This simply repeals the Costa Hawkins Act to allow local jurisdictions to determine whether to adopt rent control and to what extent. Here in San Francisco, I have authored legislation to expand rent control immediately to the 40% of tenants (about 100,000) who do not currently have the benefits and protections of rent control because of when their homes were built. (Costa Hawkins only applies to buildings built before 1979.) Rent control stabilizes communities and ensures that we keep our neighborhoods intact and our neighbors housed. Yes on 33 ensures fairness for all tenants, not a two-tiered system where some have rights and others don't.

There's a lot more on the ballot, but these are some highlights I've been working on and wanted to share with you all. Don't forget to vote—There's so much at stake!

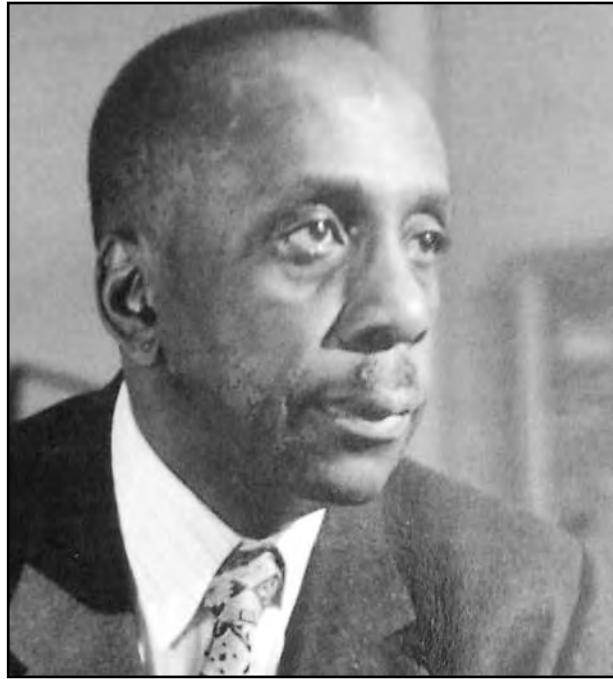
See you in the neighborhood (and at the polls!),  
Aaron



# HONORING DR. HOWARD THURMAN WE'RE STILL HERE!

by Carol Verburg

**A**s *The Semaphore* went to press, a celebration was in the works to honor one of Telegraph Hill's most distinguished residents. Dr. Howard Thurman is known worldwide for his pivot-



Portrait of Dr. Thurman.

(COURTESY OF THE THURMAN FAMILY)

al work in philosophy, religion, and social justice. As a mentor and inspiration to civil-rights leaders, Dr. Thurman authored many influential books, including *Jesus and the Disinherited*, a favorite of both Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesse Jackson.

In 2020, writing about the Howard Thurman Center for Common Ground at Boston University, Rich Barlow noted: "His life bridged eras: Born the grandson of a former slave in horse-and-buggy days, he died the year the IBM personal computer debuted. . . He preached a philosophy of Common Ground, which taught that humans need to seek an inner spiritual happiness that would lead them to share their experience in community with others."

In 1944, Dr. Thurman cofounded San Francisco's *Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples*, the first integrated interfaith religious congregation in the United States. Dr. Thurman reluctantly left Fellowship Church in 1953 to accept the position of Dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University, the first Black dean of a mostly white university.

When he retired in 1965, he and his wife, Sue Bailey Thurman, returned to San Francisco. 2020-2022 Stockton Street, on the corner of Pfeiffer, housed their family and the office of the Howard Thurman Educational Trust until Howard Thurman's death in 1981.

Eighty years after its founding, Fellowship Church chose "We're Still Here!" as the theme for its annual Convocation on October 20, 2024. The church building at 2041 Larkin Street on Russian Hill is now a San Francisco Historic Landmark. And on October 19, thanks to the efforts of neighborhood residents and a widespread coalition led by the Thurmans' grandson Anton Wong, a Commemorative Street Marker was unveiled that designates the block outside 2020-2022 Stockton as Dr. Howard Thurman Way. ☺



Newly renamed Dr. Howard Thurman Way.

© CALVIN YAN

## ART, LIFE, AND REVELATION

by Carol Verburg

**A**s I write this, I'm poised on the diving board, far from ready to plunge in.

When you read this, I'll have sunk or swum. I'll have crossed the country and met dozens of readers, theater fans, and Halloween partygoers who showed up at festive events in Minneapolis or Sandwich or Harwich or Provincetown, MA, or right here in the Bay Area, to find out more about *The Theatrical Adventures of Edward Gorey*.

Of the dozen or so books I've written, this is the

most elegant. Lavish collections of art and stories are a specialty of my San Francisco publisher, Chronicle Books. *The Theatrical Adventures* has a red velvet stage curtain (really!) wrapped around the cover. Inside are drawings that almost no one has ever seen before—unburied at last from the archives of a brilliant, eccentric artist. Edward Gorey designed the Tony Award-winning 1977 Broadway production of *Dracula*, starring Frank Langella. And the opening credits of PBS's *Masterpiece Mystery*. And several alphabets in which one hapless child after another meets an off-screen demise:

*A* is for Amy who fell down the stairs.  
*B* is for Basil, assaulted by bears.

Edward and I staged "entertainments" together on Cape Cod over a decade before he died in 2000. His New York friends assumed he'd retired years before, when he left Manhattan for the seaside village of Yarmouth Port. In fact, he'd just chosen a different fork in the road. He retired at age 75 only because he postponed getting a pacemaker until after *The Tiger Lillies* came to talk about a collaboration with the Kronos Quartet. If not for his wayward heart, Edward Gorey might



Carol Verburg and Edward Gorey.

© CHRIS REMBRANDT

have continued his theatrical adventures for another decade.

*M* is for Maud who was swept out to sea.  
*N* is for Neville who died of ennui.

And here I am, 25 years later, embarking on my first major book tour. Retirement (glimpsed in my side mirror) is farther away than it appears. While some of my friends are attending their grandchildren's weddings, others are hanging their next photo show, redesigning their garden, experimenting with painting/ceramics/quilting, or finishing a film.

The great revelation of aging—like the arts—is: We're all in this together. ☺

Celebrate A GOREY HALLOWEEN with author Carol Verburg

October 2024 Book Launch Tour

Tuesday Oct 15, 7-8 PM Big Hill Books 405 Penn Ave S, Minneapolis, MN

Thursday Oct 17, 4-5 PM Provincetown Bookshop 229 Commercial St, Provincetown, MA

Thursday Oct 17, 8:45 PM Cape Cod Theatre Co./Harwich Jr Theatre 105 Division St, West Harwich, MA

Friday Oct 18, 6:30-8 PM Town Hall, 100 Route 6A, Sandwich, MA hosted by Titcomb's Bookshop

Thursday Oct 24, 7-8 PM Books Inc in the Marina 2251 Chestnut St, San Francisco, CA

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See page 15.

# "HEY JOE PESCI, YOU GOT MAIL!"

## FRANKIE GAETANO BALISTRERI

by Naomi Marcus

**W**hen his mother, Lucrezia, was diagnosed with cancer, then 25-year-old Frankie Gaetano Balistreri cared for her at home. She craved her favorite Sicilian dishes, and she called out her wishes from her bed: FRANKIE, PASTA CON SARDE! (Pasta with sardines), FRANKIE, SFINGI! (Sicilian donuts with ricotta filling, powdered sugar). "I was running back and forth, up and down the hallway from the bedroom to the kitchen, and she'd say, YOU FORGOT TO ROAST THE PIGNOLI! (Pine nuts for the sardines). She'd taught me to cook, and I knew the dishes, but she was *particular*: 'Frankie! Pine nuts and currants!'"

She passed away "in my arms" in 1986.

Frankie is short, barrel-chested, with powerful forearms and a charming, lopsided grin. He talks fast, his deep brown eyes glint with humor, and he often cracks himself up. Under his big apron, his t-shirt reads: *When You See Frankie, Call the Cops.*

The 64-year-old chef, fisherman, husband, and father, jewel of North Beach, proprietor (with his wife, Evelyn) of the popular Portofino's Restaurant on Grant Avenue, is beloved in his North Beach community—where everyone assumes he was born.

But he was born and raised till age six in Rosarito Beach, Tijuana, Mexico, where his Sicilian father fled after getting into trouble over contraband at the port of Palermo.

"Dad left Sicily in the dead of the night," Frankie recalls, "leaving his wife and month-old daughter, my sister. Mom found him 13 years later in Mexico City selling suits on the streets, hiding, just surviving. She forgave a lot! They moved to Rosarito Beach where they opened a tourist shop on Third and Revolution, near the strip clubs, and dad fished for octopus, mussels, clams, lobsters. I was born there in 1960."

The family tried crossing the border illegally many times but never succeeded. "We'd meet our California Sicilian relatives at the border, exchanging fresh fish we brought 'em for the olive oil, cheese, and panettone they brought us." Finally, his San Francisco uncles sponsored them for citizenship and young Frankie arrived here, almost seven, fluent in Sicilian and Spanish. No English. Frankie's Spanish is still fluent, as he jokes with his Latino cooks and waiters at Portofino's. "Hey Gordo," he calls to his cook, who, he says, "dances when he cooks, all body parts moving at the stove." "Slow down!" (in Spanish)

Talking to Frankie at the parklet in front of his narrow, cozy restaurant, one is constantly interrupted by a stream of locals: high fiving him, fake wrestling him, buying fresh fish from him. ("I went to school with that guy." "This guy is my dentist; he is fixing me a grill." "That's my brother's wife's kid." "That's my lawyer.")

Arriving in San Francisco in 1966, Frankie's dad Gaetano "Tom" Balistreri fished on a 70-foot trawler



Frankie and Evelyn inside Portofino.

© COLIN CAMPBELL

and worked with his brothers who were running breweries. ("They had the Hamm's.")

The family—including big sister Rosa and younger brother Vincent—settled in at 866 Lombard Street, "right below the crooked part."

The block was all Sicilians, he recalls, and "No one spoke English at home. My neighbor Mario Bugatto raised pigeons in his aviary, and I helped feed 'em and track 'em. We kids played stickball and soldiers and ambushed each other in the bushes all over the SF Art Institute."

He hung out at the bird shop at Mason and Lombard, "That's where the wild parrots came from, those cherry-headed conures were brought here illegally and the owner let 'em go."

Around 1972, his dad quit fishing and opened the original Portofino Cafe at Columbus Avenue and Green Street, where young Frankie worked from age 12, prepping, busing, cooking. "I even was bartending—at a very tender age."

Frankie's speech is peppered with recipes; you can't get far into a conversation without him reciting a recent dish he made. Recalling his mom's baking, he digresses, "I make the best vegetarian Sfincione (Sicilian Square Pizza): Let the dough rise to its fullest, then layer saffron cauliflower, anchovy, and oregano, sprinkle toasted breadcrumbs and pecorino cheese on top, just put in the oven with lots of olive oil, OH MY GOD, I gotta

go home and make one!"

From ages nine to 16, he spent summers fishing with his grandparents and uncles, while living in his dad's home village, Porticello, Sicily (near Palermo).

"We fished for swordfish, tuna, and mackerel in the shipping lanes across from Libya. Then I'd go into town, to Bagheria, and get my dad's favorite whiskey, crown royal, in the cafe."

He graduated from San Francisco's Downtown High School ("after being kicked out of Sacred Heart") and married a few years later. ("My first wife was Chinese; she lived up the hill from me.") They had a son, Gaetano, now 35.

Frankie worked at Portofino's and spent summers fishing in Alaska, often with his brother Vince. "I could make 30 grand in five weeks, as a deckhand in Alaska."

By the '90s, Portofino's was serving up more than fine Sicilian food. "There was gambling all night long in Portofino's basement, poker machines, slot machines," he relates, and in early 1994, the police raided them. His dad was arrested for running a gambling operation. Though his father entered a diversion program and performed community service, a year later the café was raided again for illegal video poker game payoffs.

Frankie, his dad, and brother were indicted for conspiracy to distribute drugs. He doesn't dwell on the details, just refers to google. "You can look it up." ([sfgate.com/bayarea/article/drug-ring-dismantled-fbi-says-north-beach-club-3033308.php](http://sfgate.com/bayarea/article/drug-ring-dismantled-fbi-says-north-beach-club-3033308.php))

His first marriage ended in 1994 when he was sentenced to prison.

"I was looking at 25 to life for racketeering." He got three years.

His lawyers delayed his sentence, but, finally, he had to serve his time: 1999-2002. His first six months were at Taft Federal Prison (Kern County) and the rest of his sentence at Sheridan Federal Detention Center in Oregon. "I was in with congressmen, senators, judges, all the white-collar guys, no rapists or druggies!"

Frankie's resourceful, irrepressible nature and cooking skills came in handy. First, he washed dishes. But his talents were quickly discovered.

"You know how many pans I had to clean, for 1500 inmates? I said, 'Let me be the baker boss; baking is where you can steal everything.' He smiles broadly. "This old Jewish bookie from Florida was the baker, and I took over from him. All day I baked, from pancakes in the morning to pizza for dinner. Had to follow federal guidelines on the recipes and learn how to make Kwanza dishes and kosher dishes for the Jewish prisoners. I even made pan dulce and empanadas for the Mexican holidays. The bookie showed me how to make booze: Yeast with grapefruit peel makes fine grapefruit vodka if you ferment it. And prunes make wine!"



Serving patrons outside.

© COLIN CAMPBELL

Cooking wasn't enough "to pass my time away" so when another inmate suggested he place a personal ad in a few newspapers, "I had nobody to talk to cause I was getting divorced, so why not?" For a pack of cigarettes, "This Mexican coyote I was in prison with sent my photo to some Asian papers."

Frankie had himself photographed in his khakis up against the perimeter prison yard fence—where you could see the oil derricks rising high into the sky, there off Interstate 5.

"I wrote that I was an oil rig worker and surveyor." And the letters gushed in, like oil.

### Mail Call!

"My prisoner number was 90949011, but everyone, even the custody officers, called me 'Joe Pesci': 'Hey Joe Pesci, you got mail!'"

Letters began arriving from the Philippines, and a few from Thailand.

"Forty a day, 50 a day. There were too many letters to read, so we sat around and traded them, my cellmate was a counterfeiter, and he sifted through the letters: 'She looks good. Not this one. Hey, maybe this one's for you.'"

Frankie whittled it down to 10 to 12 faithful correspondents, among whom was Evelyn, the Filipina who became his beloved wife.

She saw his ad in the back of a Philippine comic book. "We were pen pals for seven years."

When Frankie finally confessed that he was in prison, all but two stopped writing.

"Evelyn wrote she'd wait for me because she admired my honesty."

Frankie got out on December 13, 2002 and landed in Manila on March 3rd, 2005. Those dates are indelible; they roll off his tongue.

"I got out with nothing, and no credit, but jobs waiting for me at the wharf at local restaurants: Pompei's, Alioto's, later at U.S. Restaurant (all since closed). As soon as I got off parole, after three years, I flew to meet her!"

We stayed at the Manila Shangri-La, a top luxury hotel. Gloria Arroyo was staying down the hall."

Evelyn watches her husband describe their courtship with an inscrutable expression, as she unloads restaurant supplies from their Toyota TRD.

"When I came here in 2005, I started running with the tears and fire. It was hectic, overwhelming; I didn't know what was going on, I didn't speak good English, and my first job was McDonald's. I thought America was: If you work hard, you find dollars on the street

and get rich. But you need 100 jobs to be ok."

She shakes her head, ruefully, "It's a round circle, up and down."

They were married at City Hall in 2005, and Frankie opened Palermo's Deli on Vallejo Street, training Evelyn in the family business, but then "taxes bit me in the ass" so he sold it in 2008. (It's now run by his brother Vincent and his niece as Palermo's Deli II.)

After losing the deli, there were hard years.

Evelyn, by now the mother of a toddler and pregnant with their second son, worked as a janitor at a North Beach bakery and at a beauty salon.

Frankie drove delivery trucks for Lettieri. And they worked on the Red and White fleet as servers for party



Frankie showing menu.

© COLIN CAMPBELL

Ironically, the insurance settlement he received got them back on their feet and back to North Beach, where they raise their three sons, Giocino, now 18, Anthony, now 16, and Frankie Jr., now 10.

And finally, in March 2020, 24 hours before San Francisco went into lockdown, Frankie's dream of opening a fine seafood restaurant, where his recipes could be showcased, came true.

Portofino's had its long planned grand opening party literally on the eve of the Pandemic.

Hard times, but they survived.

Evelyn smiles, when asked how things are now, as they prep on an August afternoon. "I got three kids growing up, our lives are exciting and surprising, one day we're good, one day is not."

Frankie adds, "The last time I took a vacation was when I was locked up! I came out, and I started opening places, who has time for vacation?"

As they unload supplies, another North Beach denizen walks by,

"Hey Frankie, whatcha got there? Whatcha selling now, shark fins?"

"No, of course not, cause that's illegal!"



Sardine special. © COLIN CAMPBELL

cruises.

But they still couldn't make rent, ending up couch surfing with extended family, which created too much tension. They moved into an SRO in the Tenderloin, "My youngest was a month old, and the bed bugs were eating him alive."

Eleven months they were homeless. "My kids grew up real fast." Finally, they got into a family shelter.

Then Frankie was in a bad accident in the rain near the airport, while delivering for Lettieri. His shoulder required five surgeries.



Frankie and happy customers.

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# WASSAMATTA YOU?

by Charles Versaggi

Conceived in Sicily and born in the U.S. in 1946, four months after Japan surrendered to the Allied Powers, I began my life's journey as the first-born son of a first-generation Italian American family, caught between two cultures, navigating from one to the other, feeling neither Italian nor American, a stranger in a strange land.

North Beach in the '40s and '50s was a veritable village of one big family to about 30,000 mostly first- and second-generation Italians. Saints Peter and Paul Church was its spiritual center and the preserver of Italian language and culture. I spoke Sicilian at home and learned to speak English at Ss. Peter & Paul Elementary School ("Salesian School"), adjacent to its namesake church. Sicilian was the language of local fishermen that included my maternal grandfather, who chased salmon from Alaska to southern California, and a large extended family, some who lived their lives speaking only a few English phrases.

Both sides of my family were from the village of Augusta on the eastern coast of Sicily. Though my mother was born in Detroit, her native-born Italian parents returned with her to Augusta before World War II where she met my father as teenage lovers and married in 1944. After the war ended, my mother and her parents returned to the U.S. and moved to North Beach, where they lived on Varennes Street on Telegraph Hill. A year after I was born, my father joined us to live in a small apartment on Lombard Street near Joe DiMaggio Playground.

My father, who served as a captain major with the Italian resistance to Mussolini's fascists, returned from World War II a decorated Bersagliere commando for the Royal Italian Army after defeating the Nazis with the Allied forces at the Battle of Monte Cassino. He was one of 200 in a battalion of 2,000 to survive the bloody carnage.

Prior to the war, my father earned a master's degree in engineering as a merchant marine, but it wasn't accredited because Italy was a former Axis power. To make ends meet, he was forced to work as an unskilled



Saverio Versaggi (second, left first row) was one of 200 in a battalion of 2,000 to survive the Battle of Monte Cassino in WWII.

laborer at the California-Vulcan Macaroni factory in the Embarcadero, which was to become the Golden Grain Company known for its Rice-A-Roni brand of seasoned pasta and rice.

Although many Italian Americans had gone overseas to help fight Germany and Italy during the war, others were labelled enemy aliens and put in internment camps with Japanese Americans. Fisherman's Wharf was closed off to local seamen, many of whom were Sicilian immigrants. Those arrested by the FBI for suspicious activity included Joe DiMaggio's mother.

During the late '50s, when I was 12, my family moved from North Beach across town to the Sunnyside district in south-central San Francisco, a quiet residential neighborhood where generations of immigrant families were now well assimilated into the American melting pot. My father left the pasta factory as vice president of manufacturing, became a naturalized U.S. citizen, and realized his dream of becoming a successful small-business entrepreneur—first as the owner of Sam's Vienna Delicatessen and then as a restaurateur before early retirement in his late '50s. 'Sam' was more "American" and easier for customers to remember than 'Saverio,' a common Sicilian name. 'Vienna Delicatessen' was the shop's original name, run continuously for nearly 75 years by a succession of mostly immigrant owners.

As the first-born son, eight-to-ten years older than my two brothers, I struggled to balance family obligations with individual aspirations. "Sam's Deli" was where I spent my teenage years serving customers, making our famous potato and macaroni salads, preparing freshly made sandwiches, stocking shelves with canned goods—and cutting up the endless cardboard boxes. "Chally, you got'a finish cutting up'a da boxes before you can play with your friends!"

Often local customers would greet my father with, "Hey, was-samatta you?" Although my highly educated father could speak

English very well, he couldn't hide his heavy Italian accent that was made fun of. Sometimes he'd laugh with them, but he usually smiled quietly as he registered a sale. On the inside, I felt humiliated for him. Although we never discussed it, I felt the prejudice of being from an immigrant Sicilian family—a Wop, a Dago, derided for our ethnicity.

(Note: Contrary to popular belief, 'Wop' does not stand for "without papers." It likely originated from the Southern Italian dialectal term 'guappo,' meaning "dandy" or "swagger." One interpretation of 'Dago' is "getting paid as the day goes"—getting paid under the table. The term 'Guinea' as a slur for Italians likely comes from "Guinea Negro," used in the 1740s to refer to black people or those of mixed ancestry. It later became associated with Italians, possibly due to their darker complexion compared to other European immigrants.)

Although we still had close ties with our Sicilian friends and family in North Beach, our move to Sunnyside represented a stark divorce from my beloved Italianita as I tried to assimilate into a different neighborhood, one that was more "American." As a teenager trying to find my identity, I found myself balancing two cultures, not fully belonging to either Sicilian or American. I encountered ethnic prejudices and stereotypes, feeling racially ambiguous and not fully accepted. When I wore stylish Italian clothing and shoes for formal occasions, I was made fun of because I looked and dressed differently. (Little did I know, I was ahead of my time, a fashion trendsetter!)

Over the years, whenever I would mention my Sicilian heritage to someone, all too often they would respond in jest, "Oh, you're a Mafioso—a gangster, a crook." Although America's attitudes toward Sicily have changed over the past 50 years, Sicily and the Mafia are still inextricably linked in popular culture. Despite their artistic merit, *The Godfather* movies and TV series like *The Sopranos*—both fictional works by Italian authors—reveal Hollywood still can't quite move on from this stereotype. Paradoxically, these works gave Italian Americans a sense of ethnic pride as we saw ourselves in these portrayals the way our families lived.

Several years ago, I was chatting about Italy with a friend over lunch. Our conversation caught the attention of a well-dressed man at an adjacent table who joined our discourse. As we cordially chatted with him, he mentioned he was from a town in northern Italy. When I casually said my family was from Sicily, his warm demeanor went cold and he ceased speaking with us, turning away to finish his meal. Many Sicilians experience discrimination from mainstream society—



Rosa (Passanisi) and Giacomo Romeo emigrated to the U.S. because they witnessed a local Mafia murder. Their son Tommy (L) died after their family's move to America.



Annie Versaggi enjoyed having all the glamorous trappings of the upper class.

and even other Italians.

Coming from a first-generation, working-class family, I felt the pressure of my parents' immigrant aspirations. During my youth, my mother would plead melodramatically, "I want you to be somebody!" Like many of our Italian friends and family, she so much wanted and enjoyed having all the glamorous trappings of the upper class—fancy car, fashionable clothes, mink furs, expensive jewelry—and French provincial furniture with plastic-covered upholstery. The garage of our Sunnyside house had a makeshift kitchen and dining room table so we could keep the "formal" kitchen and dining room upstairs pristine for "company."

Working at the deli 12-to-16 hours a day, seven days a week, my father had the immigrant dream of accumulating enough money so he could enjoy an early retirement in Sicily and show his family and friends he "had made it." In the early '60s, he sent my mother and two younger brothers to live in Augusta for the summer. But the experiment was short-lived, thanks to oppressive triple-digit temperatures and cultural shock my mother failed to overcome.

After my mother died in my late 20s from breast cancer, her ghost haunted me in my dreams: "Chally, I want you to be somebody! I want you to make me proud!" But the message I really got was, "You're nobody." If I wasn't "somebody," I was existentially nobody. No matter what I did, it was never good enough. It was a script for failure. When she identity died, my almost died with him.

High school and college were difficult times for me. I was stuck in a treadmill of trying to prove myself, perpetually distracted by my anxiety of inferiority rather than being focused on my passions for doing what I love. But her death was also the beginning of learning who I really was, dealing head-on with her ghost, finally putting her and her "somebody" mantra to rest to become the self-realized person I am today. I'm proud of my Sicilian heritage and deal with stereotypes as an educational moment.

As Italian Americans assimilated and moved from North Beach and other "Little Italys" across the nation, the discrimination they faced gradually passed as they became accepted into mainstream society. Between 1820 and 1990, more than five million Italians, the majority from Southern Italy and Sicily, immigrated to the U.S. and about 18 million persons of Italian descent presently live here.

Today, the U.S. is home to a record 46.1 million immigrants, accounting for nearly 14% of the population. Our immigrant population has grown significantly since the 1960s, with the largest shares coming from Mexico, India, China, the Philippines, and El Salvador. Immigration remains a contentious political issue. Partisan divide has made it difficult to achieve meaningful immigration reform.

As America continues to struggle with our immigration dilemma, balancing identity with policy, we need to be reminded that our nation was built by



Annie and Charles Versaggi on the steps of the family's Varennes St. flat.

immigrants and their descendants. Finding an equitable approach to this challenge will require a commitment to the values of diversity and inclusion that have long defined America at its best.

My story ends with an auspicious beginning: Circa 1902, my maternal great-grandfather Giacomo Romeo and his wife Rosa Passanisi left Augusta, Sicily because he was to be called as a witness to a murder trial involving the local Mafia. Warned about his family being in mortal danger, rather than take any chances with their lives, he and his wife decided to emigrate to the U.S., joining the millions of Sicilians in the first Italian diaspora. Had they not made this timely move, I wouldn't have been able to author this essay. *"A chi è cchiù fortunato, l'ora è bona."*—"For the luckiest, the time is good." —Sicilian proverb.

"And so you know the difficulty in becoming an American. It isn't a sudden process. You get over it. But you don't ever quite get over it. You carry it with you. That's the great—and not so great—aspect of being or trying to be an assimilated American." —Gay Talese, about his experience growing up the son of immigrants from Southern Italy in 1940s South Jersey.



After the war, Saverio joined Annie and first-born son Charles to live on Lombard Street.



Saverio "Sam" Versaggi at the family's delicatessen.



## WATERFRONT REPORT

by Greg Chiampou, Committee Co-Chair  
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**T**he Port of San Francisco holds monthly public Advisory Committee and Port Commission meetings, addressing Port land use, leasing, and development projects—topics that can spark spirited public reactions, as they should.

While not comprising a comprehensive list, these are several “heated” topics from recent Port meetings and panels.

### Proposed Fisherman’s Wharf Revitalization Plan

On October 8, the Port Commission approved a nonbinding term sheet for Fisherman’s Wharf Revitalized LLC’s (FWR) proposed mixed-use project at Pier 45 Sheds A and C and Seawall Lots 300/301(aka the “Triangle” parking lot). This document outlined the project’s deal structure, including lease terms, funding, and the amounts dedicated to infrastructure investment.

The project’s developer, FWR, envisions creating several new entertainment, event, dining, and public spaces across the five-acre site. This \$548 million project would be the largest investment at the Wharf since 1978’s Pier 39 development. Seawall and infrastructure improvements are projected to be major cost components, as shown in “Sources and Use of Funds for the Wharf Redevelopment at Pier 45 and SWL 300/301” below.

Now that the Commission has approved the term sheet, the Port and FWR will next seek the Board of Supervisors’ endorsement of this nonbinding term sheet and a finding of fiscal feasibility, the Port stating that these steps will be carried out within the next 12 months.

The Commission meeting’s official agenda and the public audience’s unofficial one seemed to be at odds: Attendees expected to address—and spoke up about—FWR’s project concept itself, whereas the Commission’s agenda called for voting on the term sheet, which audience members had not seen previously.

So, let’s break this down.

The Port Commission, the Port, and the developers had previously (and privately) already discussed, vetted, and negotiated this nonbinding term sheet by the time of the public session. At the meeting, the Port highlighted, for the Commission’s benefit, several of the term sheet’s key financial assumptions and requirements, as well as the Port’s strategic goals for redeveloping the Wharf. Of most interest to the public was the new disclosure of the project’s expected funding.

### Sources and Use of Funds for the Wharf Redevelopment at Pier 45 and SWL 300/301.

Source: 10/8/24 San Francisco Port Commission meeting.

SOURCE	Source Amount	USE	Use Amount
Equity	\$294,800,000	Pier 45	\$401,500,000
Debt	\$239,100,000	SWL 300/301	\$ 82,600,000
CFD/IFD*	\$ 36,600,000	Other	\$ 64,000,000
Other/Credit	\$ (22,500,000)		
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$548,000,000</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$548,000,000</b>

\*Public debt

The presenters stated that of the \$401.5 million to be invested in Pier 45, \$147 million would be for infrastructure improvements. And, \$39 million in infrastructure improvements would be part of the projected \$82.6 million to be invested in seawall lots 300/301. By comparison, it would cost an inflation adjusted \$632 million in today’s dollars to build Oracle (Pac Bell) Park (source: Wikipedia).

Approximately 12 citizens, the majority of whom were critical of the FWR project as currently envi-

# WHOSE WATERFRONT?

sioned, then addressed the Commission. Those in opposition identified their ties to the Wharf’s fishing industry and/or ownership of nearby businesses. All cited the project’s prospective negative impacts on the existing commercial fishing community, particularly the development’s plans for Pier 45 (e.g., moving, cramping, and inconveniencing existing fishing equipment storage and staging spaces, congesting their work areas with mall traffic and an ‘event space,’ impeding fish wholesaler traffic, and forcing them to conduct daily operations in an ‘amusement park’ atmosphere). Several speakers speculated on the possible demise of the Wharf’s commercial fishing, and others questioned whether the proposed project could ever break even given the high hurdle imposed by servicing more than \$250 million in debt obligations.

Two citizens affiliated with local businesses spoke in favor of the project. While expressing empathy for the fishing community’s shared concerns, they focused on the urgent need for boosting the Pier 45 Wharf area’s commercial viability and tourism, obtaining funds for needed infrastructure improvements, and creating additional public benefits.

The Port’s stated project’s goals for this area of the Wharf include “to promote the fishing industry, its Fisherman’s wharf and...preserve the fishing industry and the fishing at the site.” As negotiations proceed, the FWR sponsors and Port will need to prove more support for the Wharf’s fishing industry so that it does not fade away or leave.

THD’s Waterfront Committee has been following FWR’s evolving design proposal for the past two years. (See Waterfront Reports in *The Semaphore* Winter 2024 and Summer 2024.) We recently met with the FWR sponsors, offering several significant concerns about the current proposal: the project design’s potential negative impact on the Wharf’s fishing industries, the inclusion of a ‘short-term apartment rental’ facility on the waterfront, and the plan to rebuild an expanded former Shed C as an event space, among other concerns.

The Commission responded to the meeting’s audience by emphasizing that it was approving a nonbinding term sheet, not the FWR project’s final development plan or design. The Commission encouraged audience members to contact their elected Supervisors with their concerns and comments about the project. The term sheet was approved 4:1.

### BCDC Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan Proposed Changes

The San Francisco Bay’s shoreline accounts for one-third of the state’s entire coastline but is projected to shoulder two-thirds of the state’s potential economic damage from sea level rise (SLR) risks.

That’s according to the newly released Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan draft ([bayadapt.org](http://bayadapt.org)) from the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). The plan aims to encourage a collective approach to SLR planning across the nine-county Bay region, rather than a county-by-county process.

BCDC is a powerful authority. Formed in 1965 by the state legislature to protect the Bay Area’s estuary coastline, BCDC has the mandate to approve, reject, or modify permitting in its jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay, 100 feet

inland of the shoreline, the Suisan Marsh, and many other waterways throughout the nine-county Bay Area.

In developing the Adaptation Plan document, BCDC’s aim is to provide “a region-wide plan for the Bay shoreline that guides the creation of coordinated, locally planned sea level rise adaptation actions that work together to achieve regional goals.” In addition, the draft Plan provides “guidelines and standards that must be used in subregional shoreline [SLR] adaptation plans as required by SB 272.”

THD applauds BCDC’s spearheading a regional,

collective approach to SLR planning and resilience. Everyone knows that rising sea water must go somewhere, and it would be self-defeating for one Bay Area city to erect, say, a tall seawall while the neighboring town’s newly developed estuary is then overloaded by runoff from the wall. BCDC is well positioned to support (and enforce) a regionally coordinated approach to SLR resilience planning, which is most certainly needed.

### Proposed Amendments to BCDC’s “San Francisco Bay Plan”

There are laws, rules, and regulations, and then there are also amendments!

BCDC, in partnership with the Port, is proposing to loosen the state’s McAtee-Petris Act’s restrictions on waterfront development at the Wharf and the Exploratorium via two amendments to the Plan. Originally devised in 1968 in response to the McAtee-Petris Act, BCDC’s plan is a comprehensive (and voluminous) guide for assessing or approving new development on the Bay and its shoreline.

The two proposed amendments are: 1) Allow the Port and the Exploratorium to set aside its original obligations to remove pre-existing landfill, and, in exchange, the Exploratorium will implement SLR public education programming; and (2) Loosen the McAtee-Petris Act’s “50%” regulation at Fisherman’s Wharf.

As background, the state’s 1965 McAtee-Petris Act sought to protect and reclaim California’s waterfront from over-commercialization and landfill. Among the Act’s requirements are that any reconstructed or replacement piers can only be replaced with piers that are half the original size, with the other 50% of the space either being removed or dedicated to public benefit and access purposes. BCDC and the Port are looking to loosen the 50% rule for “Special Areas” of the Port’s Wharf waterfront.

BCDC and the Port maintain that rehabilitating and repairing some of the dilapidated Wharf piers and pilings is often economically infeasible if the McAtee-Petris Act’s 50% restrictions are enforced. For example, the pilings and landfill underneath the former Alioto’s restaurant need repair, yet the “50% rule” would significantly reduce that area’s future commercial space and thereby prevent attracting the amount of capital needed for repairs.

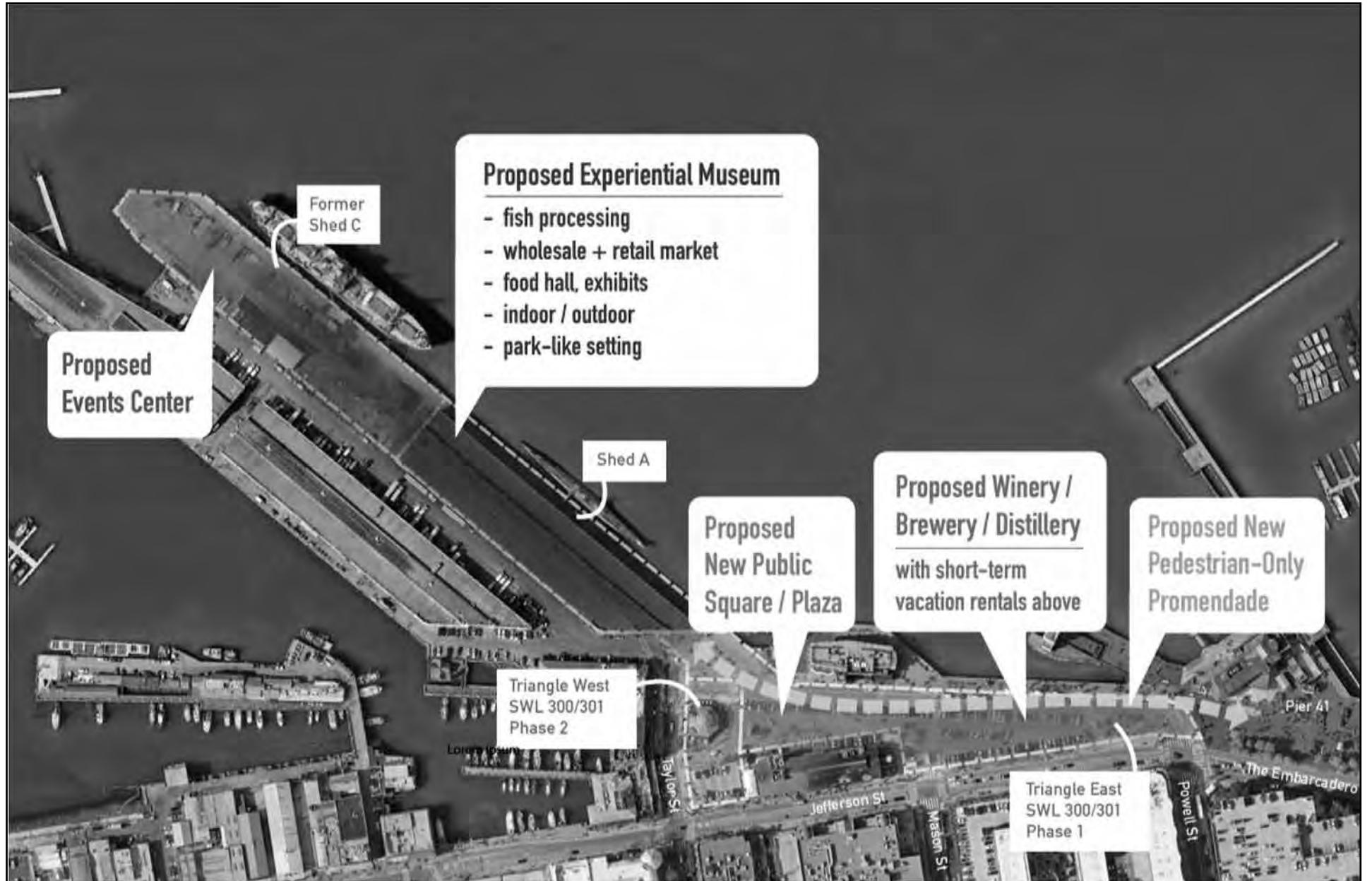
There is a different rationale for the amendment to loosen the McAtee-Petris Act’s restrictions at the Exploratorium. As part of its original 2013 permitting, the Exploratorium received an exception to the McAtee-Petris Act’s regulations. It did not have to remove the deck and pilings that form the “valley” between its location at Pier 15 and Pier 17, nor eliminate non-historic additions to the sheds at those piers. This exception was originally negotiated by BCDC and the Port, and, as part of the negotiation, the Port was required to conduct fill removal at a different location. The Port now wants relief from this fill removal obligation and requests the amendment.

Audiences at both the Port’s Northern and Fisherman’s Wharf Advisory Committee meetings did not object to either proposed amendment. But they pointed out that SLR programming might ordinarily be considered part of the Exploratorium’s core responsibility and not as a bargaining chip. Furthermore, attendees were left with the understanding that future repair of existing Wharf piers and landfill would maintain their current commercial space size (not be enlarged just because the “50% rule” was loosened).

### Embarcadero Enhancement Pedestrian Safety and Bikeway Paths

What is the SFMTA’s (and, as well, the Port’s) concomitant responsibility to ensure pedestrian safety protocols when it rolls out more and expanded bikeway paths?

The SFMTA, in partnership with the San Francisco Port, recently presented one of its latest “Embarcadero Enhancement” program initiatives: Doubling the length of the two-way protected bikeway path, extending it from Folsom to Harrison Streets and now on to Brannan



Fisherman's Wharf Revitalization Plan.

(COURTESY PORT OF SAN FRANCISCO)

Street on the Embarcadero's waterside. This protected bikeway extension requires the trade-off of narrowing the Embarcadero's existing street median (where Muni operates) and removing 15 palm trees to make room for the pathway enhancements.

SFMTA states that the existing width of vehicle lanes and the promenade will be preserved and replacement palms will be planted in the bikeway's buffer zone, but that 14 to 19 metered parking spaces will be affected.

Protecting bikers or "wheelers" on city streets is needed, no question, particularly since the recent proliferation of many types of "wheelers." ('Wheelers' is a general term encompassing bicycles as well as all types of electric bikes, motorized skateboards, and scooters but excluding automobiles.) Attendees at a recent Advisory Committee meeting were concerned that expanding bikeway paths for wheelers should not come at the potential expense of pedestrian (or driver) safety.

The City's "Vision Zero" program has identified the central Embarcadero roadway and environs as among the City's most dangerous pedestrian and traffic zones. Multiple Advisory Committee attendees responded to the expanded Embarcadero bikeway path plan by sharing their experiences with near-misses and intimidation from aggressive 'wheelers' on the Embarcadero's roadway and sidewalks, whether from motorized wheeler scofflaws operating on the Embarcadero promenade (despite an existing bikeway path) or while trying to cross at a "Walk" light.

SFMTA says it is aware of safety issues for non-wheelers on the Embarcadero, but it cannot realistically police wheeler traffic. SFMTA deploys engineering solutions when feasible, including raised waiting platforms at key pedestrian crossings such as at the Ferry Building, and implements striped crosswalks and traffic signage. Increasing both the number and size of the city's bikeway paths fits the SFMTA's stated inten-

tions to support multi-modal forms of transportation.

San Francisco has long been a city that experiments with new transportation modes—from the historical novelty of cable cars scaling our city's steep curving hills to the City's recent testing grounds for driverless ride-hail vehicles. With the recent proliferation of both the number and types of wheelers, can San Francisco instill a more respectful and safer "urban wheeler" culture, as observed in foreign cities like Copenhagen?

These four topics have a common thread: The Bay's seawall and its immediate environs. The Port's Advisory Committee and Commission meetings are open to the public, both in-person and online. (See [sfport.com/calendar](http://sfport.com/calendar).) We hope you will join us at these meetings and help prevent any "tragedy of the commons." Let us know of your interests at [Waterfront@THD.org](mailto:Waterfront@THD.org).



View of Aquatic Park and northern waterfront from Fontana Towers, 2023.

PHOTO: CHRIS CARLSSON



## TRANSPORTATION REPORT

by Howard Wong, AIA, Committee Chair  
howard.wong@thd.org

**E**xploring cities, sights, neighborhoods, and outskirts via public transit seems more revealing than by car—whether by reliable full transit coverage or by deficient systems. Either way, public transit unveils how much a city cares about its people. Fortunately, San Francisco's MUNI system has extensive routes, albeit not always reliable nor frequent throughout the days and evenings. With looming budget deficits and possible service cuts, everyone can help MUNI by riding transit—frequently and far afield—and learn a lot about the city in the process.

"It comes in handy in situations like that. People always expect you to be riding around in stretch limousines all the time, but I will sometimes take public transportation if it's convenient, and it does surprise people, you see the heads turn." Paul McCartney

### 30-Stockton

The workhorse 30-Stockton bus route has been extended further into the Presidio, making it even more useful. The new bus stop offers spectacular views, public restrooms, and an operator's rest area. When Googling "SFMTA Trip Planner" and "SFMTA 30-Stockton Bus" (or for any route or destination), one discovers the 30-Stockton's vast connectivity—from Oracle Stadium/Caltrain Station to SOMA/Downtown to Chinatown/North Beach to Fisherman's Wharf/Ghirardelli Square to Marina Green/Crissy Field/Tunnel Tops Park/Presidio. Check out other neighborhood transit gems, like the 12-Folsom, 28-19th Avenue, and 39-Coit buses.



30-Stockton bus has been extended further into Presidio—and more destinations.  
© HOWARD WONG

### Muni Survey

Muni's Rider Satisfaction Survey reveals highest rider satisfaction since 2001, with 72% of respondents rating Muni service as "excellent" or "good." Also, most Muni riders now use transit for entertainment and recreation, rather than for commuting to work or school. New work-at-home and commute patterns necessitate reimagination of routes and schedules—to get people where they want to go, when they want to travel, and how they can get to big events and gatherings.

### Ferry

A Hydrogen-fueled commercial passenger ferry, named the "Sea Change," debuted on San Francisco Bay, with service between Pier 41 and the Ferry Building—a six-month demonstration project with free rides until the end of 2024. Zero-emission hydrogen fuel cells emit only water vapor—remineralized and used in the onboard water fountain. Because transportation is the largest source of carbon dioxide emissions, this prototype is an example of State cap-and-trade dollars used to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, benefiting the economy, environment, public health, and disadvantaged communities.

### L-Taraval

The L-Taraval metro returns to service after a five-year construction project, restoring the one-seat ride between Embarcadero Station and the San Francisco Zoo. Improvements included new boarding islands, pedestrian safety measures, digital displays, train control systems, and utility lines. Beset by impacts to commercial corridors and residents, the City provided some financial compensation to businesses.

# TRANSIT UPDATES: SOME POSITIVES



New hydrogen-fueled ferry is offering free rides between Pier 41 and the Ferry Building.

© HOWARD WONG

Westside residents remain concerned about MUNI's proposal to require transfers at West Portal Station—a pandemic-realignment to reduce the number of trains in the Market Street tunnel.

### Caltrain

Caltrain completes the switch from diesel to electric trains along its 51-mile route between San Francisco and Silicon Valley, making the trip faster, quieter, more comfortable, and frequent—while paving the way for future high-speed rail. Post-pandemic, with a 67% drop in ridership, electrification will help spur ridership numbers.

### The Portal

Downtown Caltrain Extension (and high-speed rail) to the Salesforce Transit Center in downtown San Francisco gets federal pledge of \$3.38 billion. Requiring local matching funds, the remaining \$2.75 billion funding gap will be challenging. The project has two-thirds of its total \$8.26 billion cost covered. The \$728 million train box (underground space for train stations) has already been constructed as part of the Salesforce Transit Center (The Portal). Ultimately, The Portal will be a world-class state/regional transportation hub for 12 transit systems, including 12 MUNI lines. Before the \$2 billion Central Subway Project, The Portal was mandated by voters, first in line, and its earlier completion would have spurred post-pandemic downtown recovery.

### Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) Funding

The MTC Regional Transportation Funding Measure could address the fiscal crisis for all transit agencies in the nine Bay Area counties—but regional disputes nixed initial state-enabling legislation for the November 2026 ballot measure. An MTC Select Committee seeks consensus on 30-year funding sources (sales tax, payroll tax, property tax, or vehicle registration surcharge), funding distribution, funds



Tunnel Top Park is along 30-Stockton's route and Marina Green and Crissy Field.

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### Federal ADA

U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) acts on Disability Policy Priorities—to increase access to air travel, public transportation facilities, vehicles (including electric and automated), and rights-of-way; and to enable access to good-paying jobs and business opportunities for all. USDOT announced agreement that United Airlines will exceed Federal requirements to improve wheelchair-disabled access for air travel. USDOT has awarded billions of dollars (Biden Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) to modernize airport terminals, including wheelchair ramps, accessible restrooms, and more. USDOT finalized a rule requiring more accessible lavatories on new single-aisle aircraft in the short-term and larger accessible lavatories in the long-term. Also, USDOT proposes a rule to incorporate accessibility guidelines for pedestrian facilities in the public right-of-way, including sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian traffic signals, transit stops, and on-street parking. Currently, ADA compliance has been left to local/state governments for public pedestrian transportation facilities. The DOT rule will apply only to new construction or alterations to transit stops in the public right-of-way. NOTE: More than one in four—more than 70 million—adults in the United States reported having a disability.



Oracle Park and Caltrain Station are reached directly by the 30-Stockton bus.

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## PARKS & TREES REPORT

Guest essay by Amber Ortiz

**B**eing immersed in nature can be a luxury for city dwellers. In Downtown San Francisco, we now have the Redwood Grove at #Shvo's Transamerica Pyramid. It's a mid-block oasis that offers forest retreat, artsy adventure, soft seating & even a hand-crafted ping-pong table on the DG (you know, that compacted sandy material, like at R&D Kitchen in Yountville). When you play ping-pong on it, you feel nature under your shoes.

BONUS: the paddles for public use are new & clean...11 days in. Not so for the granite benches along Washington St, which have been marred by skateboarders...they couldn't resist...until the cops came....

A better drama awaits on the round stage of redwood in a fancy parquet pattern. I dream of my favorite local musicians playing here, with dancing & lounging like at shows in Big Sur. Stage lights are already strapped to the tall trees. Bring on #Folkyeah Productions!

A worse drama awaits at the pond with a flush edge that juts out into the walking path. I was worried for a lady in a wheelchair, for babies & for my ankles.

Alas. Back to bucolic luxury on the cushiony lounge chairs (wisely, they're bolted down). The Pyramid is an ideal place for Sunday in the Park with George and some sake. And the people-watching is as good as in Paris.



Family ping pong at new Redwood Park at the Transamerica Pyramid.



Amber Ortiz and friend at Redwood Park party.

NOTE: Leave your bike at home—no bike racks exist.

I caught up with my construction friend Beatrice at the park and had a good laugh when we both recognized the large curvy planters - the same model as at a mixed-use project we worked on together in Silicon Valley. In terms of urban property development, we admired that Pyramid Park has some very nice landscaping. Think rhododendrons en masse. When those bloom, it'll be WOW. (I expect Shvo's gardening budget is as robust as their Security budget. And WOW that park is well-staffed with Security guards.)

The Public Art program was also clearly well-funded. Sculptures in pleasantly faux-nature forms are skillfully located around the park. From a smooth oversized ape on a pedestal doing the final twist from Bikram Yoga, to two tortoises with mossy carapaces hidden on the ground, to abundant animals sculpted from stone & metal located among the greenery, these installations in the Redwoods give park-goers a breath of fresh air, PLUS a sense of shared PROSPERITY.

The best bang for the buck? You know my stance: outdoor ping-pong is one of the most fun activities I've discovered in California since moving here in 2013.

I was glad that Beatrice also plays. We had a good game before heading inside to gaze at the gorgeous building models from Sir Norman Foster currently on display. The Gherkin is like giant architectural jewelry

—a dark and sparkling tour de force of geometric perfection. For a free exhibit, it'll have a long-term impact on my finances. Because I want to go to London to see it in person, sigh.

For now though, I'll keep playing ping-pong in the cool California breeze, under the glorious Redwoods, for FREE.



© AMBER ORTIZ

## NEW MEMBERS WELCOMED HAPPILY

by Kim Pendleton and Greta Alexander

**O**n July 30th, THD hosted a New Members Happy Hour—well, it lasted more than an hour—at the Waystone Wine Bar on Powell Street. We've had more than 80 new members join THD since our previous Annual New Member gathering in July 2023. We invited them all and had a great turnout!

Thank you to Waystone's owner Tom Patella for choosing some amazing Hungarian wines, paired with some tasty snacks and enjoyed by all! Several people who became members at the North Beach Festival were in attendance; it was great to reconnect so soon after their joining.

If you are a new member and looking to meet other Dwellers, please consider attending the next Thirsty Third Thursday at the Savoy Tivoli on the third Thursday of the month or joining up with a group for First Fridays. We meet at Caffe Trieste at 5:30 p.m. on the first Friday of each month.

Welcome new members!

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\* \* \* \* \*  
Slide Talk by Janet Kessler



## BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS JULY-SEPTEMBER 2024

by Mary Lipian, Recording Secretary  
[mary.lipian@thd.org](mailto:mary.lipian@thd.org)

### July 2024

The First Friday meet-up will be held on August 2nd and Thirsty Third Thursday, August 15th.

June brought an impressive increase in membership with 25 people joining THD at the North Beach Fair.

The North Beach Historic District nomination was submitted to the state. Once added to the National Register of Historic Places, it will be more difficult for developers to try to build state density projects in the neighborhood. THD hopes to receive a response from the state soon.

A pre-application meeting for 955 Sansome will take place at the San Francisco Planning Department on July 23rd at 10 a.m. THD Members are highly encouraged to attend in person, filling the room and demonstrating the neighborhood's concerns and opposition to the proposed project, which is massive in scale. The plans are to demolish the existing two-story parking garage and construct a new out-of-scale 24-story above grade and one-story below grade mixed-use structure.

### August 2024

No Board Meeting.

### September 2024

The pre-application meeting for 875 Sansome at Broadway took place on September 4. The developers are using double-state density bonuses and zoning loopholes to justify moving downtown Financial District high rises north past Washington Street to two historic districts, Jackson Square and the Northeastern Historic District. THD members were encouraged to attend.

The start time for the September 10 Board Meeting was delayed until 7:45 p.m. to allow board members to view the Presidential Debate, occurring the same evening. The format for the meeting was a working session with the Social Committee to plan the THD 70th Anniversary and Coit Tower Murals 90th Birthday celebration. The event will take place on October 19th from 12 to 4 p.m. at Pioneer Park.



### TREASURER'S REPORT

by Peter Stevens  
[peter.stevens@thd.org](mailto:peter.stevens@thd.org)

My theory of neighborhood investment includes both capital improvements and social vibrancy initiatives. We want to create beautiful spaces and opportunities for people to enjoy those spaces.

Capital improvement update: It is undeniable that Telegraph Hill has beautiful gardens and greenery. We all can be proud of our community gardens on the Vallejo or Filbert Steps, among others. This did not happen by accident. It takes continued community

investment and involvement. For those who do not know, Telegraph Hill Dwellers partnered with Friends of the Urban Forest to plant a series of trees around our District. Our largest expense this quarter is the payment for the first 17 of these trees. We are committed to ongoing investment in tree planting and neighborhood beautification.

Social vibrancy update: I'm a big believer in investing in fun! Our other big event this quarter is the Telegraph Hill Dwellers' 70th Anniversary Party. I am writing this before the event, so I hope it goes well. We wanted this to be a celebration of all things Telegraph Hill and North Beach. Catering will be done by Tony's Pizza, Caffe Trieste, Savoy Tivoli, and Victoria Pastry. The event itself is on the lawn of our most cherished monument, Coit Tower.

Now we look toward 2025, and all the work we would like to get done. If you are interested in working on fundraising, please let me know by emailing me at [peter.stevens@thd.org](mailto:peter.stevens@thd.org).

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## THD COMMITTEES NEED YOU

Get involved in our neighborhood and make a difference! Join a THD committee and help keep the Hill a special place to live.

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- Central Police District Community Advisory Board: Daryl Babbitt
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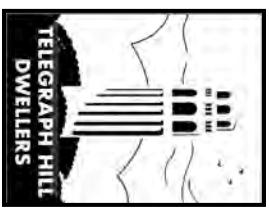
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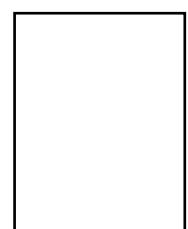
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# The Semaphore

A Publication of the TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

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## THE SEMAPHORE #247 Fall 2024

### FEATURES and COLUMNS

Kids Corner by Sarah Kilban .....	1
President's Corner by Nick Ferris .....	2
Restaurant News: Da Flora by Stephen Lisiisen .....	3
District 3 Supervisor's Report: Election Recommendations by Aaron Peskin .....	4
Honoring Dr. Thurman: We're Still Here! by Carol Verburg .....	5
Art, Life, and Revelation by Carol Verburg .....	5
Frankie Gaetano Ballisteri by Naomi Marcus .....	6
 <hr/>	
<b>THD BUSINESS</b>	
Board of Directors and Committees .....	15
Become a Member .....	15
 <hr/>	
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